

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Issue Fact Sheet

The Issue: Minimizing visitor conflicts

Background: Since the establishment of the refuge in 1924 recreational uses have changed. In the past, the primary user groups were hunters and anglers, a relatively smaller population of recreationists more evenly dispersed throughout the landscape. Today finds many more people coming to the river to recreate, activities now include wildlife observation, hiking, bicycling, boating and beach and water use, as reflected in the numbers below. We have more people, demand for more use, but the same Refuge.

FY2002 Visitation

Interpretation and Wildlife Observation	450,000 visits
Hunting	355,000 visits
Fishing	1.1 million visits
Trapping	9,500 visits
Beach and Water use	1.2 million visits

Technology has out paced the slower motions of the river's backwaters. Where once the sound of a paddle slapping water's edge marked the arrival of a lone visitor to a remote slough, today's high tech boating equipment is taking people into places easier, faster and louder. An increasing number of speed boats and water skiers on the main channel poses potential conflicts with smaller, traditional fishing boats.

Early and late season state waterfowl hunting seasons have been added to the list of new activities, thus placing waterfowl hunters into areas to be shared with deer hunters, anglers, and trappers. Additional recreational facilities have been developed including trails, fishing docks, visitor contact stations, and wildlife observation decks to provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities but at the same time these improvements position user groups in close proximity to each other.

The policy that guides the refuge system, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 designated hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation as the priority wildlife-dependent public uses of the refuge system. When considering alternatives for management and planning, these six priority uses must receive priority consideration over other uses.

Main Concerns:

1. The public may not accept time and space restraints to ensure high quality and safe recreational opportunities.
2. Conflicts between user groups are increasing.
3. Some groups fear those traditional consumptive uses of the Refuge, such as hunting, trapping and fishing may be curtailed.
4. There is a lack of staffing and funding on the Refuge to meet the demands for interpretive and educational programs and facilities.